

June 4, 2024

The plot of Jane Austen's "Sense and Sensibility" is set by the untimely death of a parent in a blended family. Although denizens of the 21st Century like to think this Georgian injustice no longer occurs, one of this week's headlines is proof there are still Miss Dashwoods today. Thankfully other articles involving blended families illustrate a higher level of commitment.

PEOPLE on May 30th featured, "Gabrielle Union and Dwyane Wade Celebrate Zaya's 17th Birthday with Sweet Photos of Their Blended Family." The celebrity couple posted pictures from their ten-year collaboration on Wade's daughter Zaya to both his and her social media accounts. The article notes, "In addition to Zaya, Union is stepmom to Wade's son Zaire, 22, . . . and Xavier, 10 . . . Wade is also the legal guardian of his nephew Dahveon Morris, 21. Union and Wade are also parents to daughter Kaavia James, 5." Zaya may be headed off to college soon, but she will always be welcomed back into the nest.

In the June 1st edition, The Daily Mail headline revealed, "Inside JLo's Bond with Her Blended Family." The article feeds on the speculation of impending divorce between Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez who once shared the portmanteau Bennifer. The Mail opines, "[A] clean break would never be easy with their family lives so heavily intertwined." Ben and JLo are the parents of five children from previous relationships. Adding a further twist to this blended family is the full participation (at JLo's behest) of Affleck's former wife in family events. The word "co-parenting" is in constant play by the symbiotic trio.

The Wall Street Journal published on June 1st, "The Brady Bunch Breaks Down: Estate Fights Tear Stepfamilies Apart." In a reversed situation to the circumstances of Austen's three Miss Dashwoods, the Journal notes, "A surviving spouse often has no obligation to leave assets to stepchildren." According to family law attorneys, the exclusion of stepsiblings in estate settlements has led to an increase in contested wills. Among the proposed solutions in estate planning for blended families are pre-nuptial agreements and setting actual dollar amounts for each child in the will.

Blended families are found throughout the Bible. In a sense, even the Holy Family (Joseph, Mary and Jesus) was a blended family. This is because Joseph married Mary who brought to the union a child whose paternity was not Joseph's (Matt 1:20). Joseph's genealogy in the first chapter of Matthew includes the blended family of King David (Matt 1:5-6). The narrative of this blended family is the subject of the book of Ruth.

Like some modern blended families, Ruth was involved in a contested estate. Though a foreign national, Ruth, through her deceased husband estate, held title to land in Israel. Whoever bought this land also acquired Ruth as his wife (Rth 4:5). Any children Ruth would bear could claim part of her spouse's estate held previous to the marriage. The possibility of a contested will was enough for the primary candidate to

declare, "I cannot buy the land because I might endanger my own estate" (Ruth 4:6). Boaz had no such reservations, and he gladly joined this blended family (Ruth 4:10). Because Boaz was willing to risk his estate, he is included in the lineage of Jesus (Matt 1:5). Such an inheritance was more than Mr. Dashwood could leave his daughters.